



FILE PHOTO OF MARK FELT APPEARING ON CBS' "FACE THE NATION" ON AUG. 30, 1976/ASSOCIATED PRESS

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A Brave Friend

A long time ago I wrote a magazine piece about how Bob Woodward's famous source, "Deep Throat," could have been a mere Secret Service technician — any one of several people detailed to keep Richard Nixon's secret White House taping system operating. I figured that anyone with access to the system could quickly learn all that mattered about the Watergate burglary: The president's men had done it and the president was covering it up. I showed the piece to Woodward, who would not say whether it was right or wrong, just that it made sense. We both knew, though, that "Deep Throat" was Mark Felt.

Woodward's knowledge was firsthand, up close and certain. Mine was different. It came from having worked with Woodward early in his career. I was looking into rumors that Nixon's vice president, Spiro Agnew of Maryland, was under investigation by the U.S. attorney's office in Baltimore. Somehow — I can't remember exactly — I worked a bit with Bob on that story. His source, a person he used to call "my friend," had terrific information — stuff that, looking back on it, not

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even the prosecutors in Baltimore had yet learned. Woodward would refer to his notes, and I could see the initials "M.F." They stood either for "my friend" or Mark Felt, whose name almost instantly surfaced. I thought it didn't matter. The two were the same. There was a single source.

Now we know it is Mark Felt. He has confessed, if that's the right word — although given his age (91) it's not exactly clear what he was intending. Suffice it to say, though, that he is the man. He was No. 2 in the FBI back in the Watergate days, and he just could not abide the way the bureau was being abused by Nixon and his White House colleagues. They wanted to use the FBI to block any real investigation into the

Watergate burglary. Felt simply would not permit that.

I applaud. We all applaud, or we should. Here was a man who put his career — and it was a truly great career — on the line. Here was a man who took seriously all that stuff about duty and loyalty and — permit me, please — the American Way. He was, to say the least, no showboater. He did not rush out to write a book or appear on "Larry King Live" or sell his story to the movies, which he could have done. No, he did what he thought was right.

The reason I loved my theory about the nonexistent Secret Service technician is that he was the proverbial little man. He was the guy you don't notice who is appalled by wrongdoing and wants to do the right thing. He asks no reward and he demands no fame. He wants only to show the big boys that the little guys, in the end, cannot be taken for granted. He is always there. He has to be taken into account. He can always go to the media.

Felt was too important to be "the little guy." That made what he did even braver. He was always an obvious suspect. He clearly knew too much.

For more than 30 years I have had people tell me that Deep Throat did not exist. He was invented, made up. Or he was a composite — a piece of this person and a piece of that person with some fiction thrown in. I knew better. I had seen the notes and, besides, I knew Woodward and Carl Bernstein. They would not lie.

We live in a cynical era. The press has been knocked off its Watergate-era pedestal and prosecutors are rounding up anonymous sources because it is more important to seal a leak than to get at the truth. The public either applauds or does not give a damn. Everything is the same. Big government. Big media. What does it matter?

But Mark Felt knew that it mattered. Remember: He was No. 2 in the FBI. Remember: He carried a gun. And remember, too: Despite all that, when he was afraid for his bureau and for his country, he went to a reporter and told his story and changed history. Richard Nixon resigned and countless White House officials went to jail partly because of what Felt told that reporter. That's how it started, anyway.

Now that I know for sure that Mark Felt is Deep Throat, nothing really changes. I always suspected it was him. And I knew, no matter who it was, that I could always paraphrase Woodward: For what Felt did for us all, he was "our friend."

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